
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Anacostia Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	13th and W Streets, NW	() Consent
Meeting Date:	September 22, 2011	(x) New construction
Case Number:	07-433	() Addition
		() Alterations
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Revised concept

Description and background

The applicant, Four Points LLC, with PGN Architects PLLC, requests the Board's continued conceptual review of a proposal to redevelop a large parcel—nearly a quarter of a square—with 23 three-story townhouses, some facing a new L-shaped mews or alley within the block, extended off 13th Street and an existing north-south driveway on one of the lots.

The project also includes the reconstruction of 1242 W Street, SE (built 1906), the only historic building that still stood on the parcel in recent years, and one that has since collapsed and been removed. Its reconstruction was proposed and made a condition of Board support because of previous neglect of the building. The smaller, detached house—and the alley opening onto W Street—also break down the bulk of the new construction into lengths closer to Anacostia's older rows.

All of the buildings would be of frame construction, and all but the reconstruction of 1242 would have principally fiber-cement siding and panels as a skin.

The Board last reviewed this application in November 2007. At the time, the Board generally supported the concept, including the reconstruction of 1242 W, but had not granted final conceptual approval pending some additional development.

The Board had supported being adventurous with the design of the alley dwellings, but had concerns about their three-story height (over a raised basement), given that a new alley was being created adjacent to two-story buildings, and there are no alley dwellings in the historic district. The applicant has reduced the height and the apparent height somewhat, eliminating some tower-like projections and terminating the projecting bays at the second story.

The layout of the alley has not changed much, but one of the units has now been located on V Street, next to 1229 V, cutting off a formerly planned alley outlet.

Evaluation

The projecting bays on all the units have been narrowed, benefiting the design, although this is more apparent in the elevation drawings than in the perspectives, which do not reflect the latest revisions.

The bays of the street-fronting, westernmost units ought to relate a little more closely to the body of the buildings; the use of fiber-cement panels and Stick-Style-type trim on the bays but not on the rest of the façade makes them too distinct. The motivation to create the appearance of panels is understandable, but that was more common for one-story hemi-hexagonal bays on homes of the Civil War era. The massing of the bay-fronted units is more akin to that of late-Victorian homes, which were usually brick throughout. As a solution, it is suggested that the applicant simply replace the flat fiber-cement panels on each bay with narrow-exposure weatherboard siding to match the rest of the house, leaving only the trim to mark a distinction.

The choice of specific materials will be important. It is not clear exactly what the “rusticated stone masonry” of the foundations or bases will be. It is unlikely to be rusticated stone, as the labels might suggest. In that case, it raises the possibility of some kind of concrete masonry unit or a precast block. It is of less importance under the porches of the “Type 1” homes (and could conceivably be the sort of rock-faced concrete block that was used so widely in the early twentieth century), but it becomes a major visual element of the bay-fronted buildings. Brick would actually be a preferred material there (as would a precast or cast stone that is a better stand-in for actual stone), but the applicant will have to avoid using a split-faced block or jumbo brick or something of a similar nature. If cost is an issue, it is suggested that the cornices might be reduced in complexity to partly compensate.

The incorporation of an entire floor under a mansard roof creates a disproportionately tall attic story, but it is preferable to having the face of the buildings simply continue up three floors. This proportion can be improved a bit visually simply by heavying up the flashing at the roof ridge, at least doubling the width presently depicted.

The details of the reconstruction of 1242 W require some refinement. The porch posts are a bit spindly, and they may have originally supported “gingerbread” spandrels. The wood railing should be lower than the present code-compliant height in order to be of the proper, traditional proportion. The porch deck should be narrow, wood, tongue-and-groove boards running perpendicular to the façade. The casing around the front door and transom is too broad, reducing the transom to little more than a slot. On the other hand, the windows should have a broader casing and/or window hoods that are more typical of buildings of the turn of the twentieth century; the present hoods look like lintels, out of place on a frame building. Perhaps most important is the fact that only the front of the building is depicted in elevation and section. The rest is little more than a rectangle in the plan. Staff expects to work with the applicant on the rest of the building so that it is consistent in materials with those shown for the façade, and so that it is in the spirit of a historic building, while not intending to fool observers as to its actual age.

The 2007 section and perspective drawings were a little more complete and detailed with respect to the design of the rears of the buildings, but these designs have apparently not been revised

since, as further developed drawings have not been included in the set. As the site plan suggests, the rear elevations and sides are simple and planar, although at the time they had some upper balconies or decks at rear. If the applicant wishes conceptual approval at this point, it obviously leaves to the approval of the staff the development of the designs for these secondary elevations.

The relocation of a unit to V Street since the 2007 concept naturally raises the question of its appearance; it is not depicted in the set except in the site plan. Its footprint is a bit different from those of the other houses, but it is obviously bay-fronted, like the “Type 2” houses. That is not out of context given 1229 V next door. The shadow of the building compared to its neighbors’ suggests that it is of the same height, i.e., two stories rather than the three stories of the rest of the project. This is appropriate within a consistent, two-story street face, but the details must be developed. Frankly, something that resembles either the Type 1 or Type 2 houses would be compatible here without the third story.

The staff recommends that the Board approve the application in concept, with a delegation to staff of further review, with the condition that the applicant satisfactorily address the issues raised above and limit the V Street building to two stories of height.